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Langley Research Center

THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR IN POSITION MANAGEMENT

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PREFACE

This handbook sets forth criteria to assist first-line supervisors to handle position management effectively.

LHB 3250.1, dated December 1989, is rescinded and should be destroyed.

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THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

1. DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

a. Federal personnel management operates within a framework of statutes, executive orders, and regulations. Some laws and executive orders place management responsibilities directly on agency heads, subject to Office of Personnel Management (OPM) standards or review. In other cases OPM has been given either statutory authority by the Congress or delegated authority by the President to establish standards for, and to regulate and control the means of, carrying out major aspects of agency personnel management. Where OPM has been given regulatory authority, its policy, wherever possible or desirable, is to delegate to agency heads the authority to effect personnel actions and to make personnel management decisions without prior review. However, OPM will review agency policies and decisions periodically to assure compliance with appropriate rules, regulations, and procedures, and will recommend corrective action when required.

b. In all cases, whether assigned directly by the Congress, the President, or delegated to OPM, responsibility for adherence to and support of public personnel policy rests with the Agency head. In turn, the Agency head must delegate adequate personnel management authority and assign personnel management responsibilities to managers at all levels of the Agency. Although a primary responsibility for personnel management rests with the manager who is responsible for the successful accomplishment of the Agency mission concerned, the first-line supervisor also has important personnel management responsibilities. The person-to-person relationships that occur at the work site are of critical importance. These relationships decisively affect employee morale and productivity -- either positively or negatively. The supervisor's skill in communication, leadership, motivation, evaluation of performance, and human relations can be a major asset in making a top manager's decisions effective at the working level.

2. WORKFORCE UTILIZATION AND POSITION MANAGEMENT

a. Effective supervision includes responsibility for the best possible use of the workforce resources immediately available in the organization to carry out the Langley Research Center's mission effectively and at the lowest possible costs.

b. Federal personnel management embodies a number of systems, techniques, and procedures to assist in the management of an organization's human resources.

c. Almost without exception, the fundamental use of organization - the individual position - forms the basis of these systems, techniques, and processes. Positions come into existence when management breaks out broad work objectives to discrete segments. Control of the position is management's chief means of controlling the direction and pace of productive effort.

d. A position has the following characteristics: (1) it is a group of current duties and responsibilities assigned by competent authority to be performed by one employee, whether on a full-time or part-time basis; (2) being occupied or vacant does not in itself change its identity or character; (3) it comes into being through action of supervisors, it is never created by personnel specialists; (4) it may be changed in the same manner as it is created; and (5) it may be created for a limited period of time (temporary) or for an indefinite period of time (permanent), and ceases to exist when it is canceled by the authority which created it, or by superior authority.

e. Management must constantly know the nature of its positions. It must know for budget purposes, how much the position is going to cost; for recruiting purposes, what type of person is needed to fill the position; and so on, through the complete range of management processes. Additionally, there exists the need for fair and consistent treatment of each employee with respect to the employee's pay. This treatment would be difficult to obtain without a sound system of position classification.

3. CLASSIFICATION OF THE POSITION

a. A position represents a specific body of work requiring the services of one individual possessing a particular set of knowledges and skills. However, positions are not static. They are in a continual process of change. If personnel management systems, which are predicated upon the individual position, are to function properly, they must be sensitive and responsive to change.

b. The position classification process provides the machinery whereby the pertinent aspects of positions are identified and organized in a form suitable for treatment by the other personnel management systems and processes (for example, staffing, compensation, and training). In this sense, the classification function is basic to other personnel management systems and therefore it is imperative that sensitivity and responsiveness to change be the hallmarks of this process. Position classifications which are functional in nature (that is, they are based on duties performed rather than broad disciplines reflecting general qualifications) seem to best meet the dynamics of positions. Such a system, when coupled with a continuing review process, should assure that position classifications are updated as significant changes in duties occur, and thereby assure that the facts about positions are maintained on a current basis.

4. THE POSITION VERSUS THE EMPLOYEE

a. Position classification involves classifying positions and not employees. The classifier is not permitted to take into account any of the personal qualities of the incumbent, such as efficiency, loyalty, length of service, sex, race, color, age, or creed.

b. There are situations, however, where an employee's individual traits or abilities may affect the nature of the work performed, and thus have a legitimate effect on the classification of the position. A particularly capable employee, for example, might be

given duties and responsibilities beyond those originally prescribed for the position. An employee of limited capacity might have some of the duties and responsibilities originally prescribed for the position taken away. In either case, the position will have changed and may require a new classification.

5. THE POSITION VERSUS THE POSITION DESCRIPTION

A position description is an officially written statement of the duties, responsibilities, and organizational relationships of a position. It does not **prescribe** the duties of the position - it merely **reports** them as they exist at any given time. It in no way interferes with any lawful authority an operating official may possess to detail an employee to different work on a temporary basis, or to change the work assignment on a continuing basis. In the latter case, the existing position description should be replaced by a new current description.

6. POSITION DESCRIPTIONS VERSUS CLASSIFICATION STANDARDS

A position description describes an individual's position and should be written in specific language to portray that position. A classification standard is a description of the many positions comprising a class and is necessarily more generalized in its approach. For this reason classification standards make poor bases for position descriptions and should not be used for this purpose.

7. CLASSIFICATION VERSUS PAY

- a. Failure to recognize the distinction between classification and pay often leads to attempts to classify positions improperly in order to solve pay problems.
- b. Basic principles of both classification and pay demand that classification problems be solved within the framework of the classification plan and that pay problems be solved within the framework of the pay plan.
- c. Congress has ordered that each position be placed in the proper grade as determined by classification standards. If it appears that the Classification Act pay rates for a given grade are too high or too low in relation to the cost of living or to what private industry pays for similar work, or for any other reason, it would be unsound to expect that these rates may be adjusted by putting positions in the wrong grades. The only proper way to raise or lower General Schedule (GS) pay rates is through Congressional action.
- d. Classification should never be used as a tool for adjusting pay rates either up or down for budget purposes or to suit the present or future employee of a position. Personnel specialists frequently encounter such situations, particularly with shortage category positions where recruitment is difficult because private industry is paying higher salaries for equivalent skills and knowledges. Likewise, employees or supervisor sometimes attempt to get a position classified to a higher grade to reward the employee

for long service, quality, and quantity of work. Classification is not the solution. In some cases, increased in-hiring rates within the grade may be recommended; in other cases, special achievement awards may be granted; and in still other instances, additional duties and responsibilities may be assigned to positions to warrant higher grades.

8. INCUMBENT'S IMPACT ON THE JOB

a. This concept means the particular capabilities of the incumbent of a position may cause the duties and responsibilities of the position to change, provided that change has the approval of responsible authority, and the changed position is officially classified. Attention is to be focused on personal qualifications rather than duties performed. Likewise, it should not be constructed as having applicability in the classification process to employee performance (efficiency), either quantitative or qualitative, which does not change the basic duty content of a position. Changes in duties and responsibilities of a position may be required or may occur for many reasons. For example, the basic work program of the unit may be changed; work procedures or techniques may be modified; the duties and responsibilities of the position may be rearranged in relation to other positions; or the capacity and capability of a particular incumbent may expand or reduce the position's duties or responsibilities.

b. Regardless of the reason for the change, the important points to remember are:

- (1) the change must have the approval of responsible authority;
- (2) the position, as changed, must be officially recorded and certified by a new or amended position description; and
- (3) the changed position must be evaluated and classified in accordance with controlling position classification standards.

c. Therefore, any approved impact which an employee has on the position should, as a matter of course, be considered in the position classification process. This should not relieve responsible supervisors from recognizing position changes occurring for this reason and, if such changes are acceptable, initiating the necessary classification processes.

9. SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES

a. In conjunction with the supervisor's role in effective position management, and with the guidance and assistance of the personnel officer, the actions outlined below should be taken to carry out responsibilities for workforce utilization.

b. The supervisor should utilize human resources economically and effectively by defining duties clearly, identifying the performers of the duties, and distributing assignments among the performers. This responsibility is of critical importance

concerning assignment of higher level duties to an employee without the employee having the benefit of promotion to an appropriate grade level for the work performed. Self-imposed Agency grade or dollar ceilings to control grade escalation cannot be used as a basis for denying a higher grade to a position when the grade is warranted under OPM standards.

c. OPM directs that managers control job changes that warrant higher grades until they have obtained necessary approvals from appropriate authority. Denied such approval, the higher graded duties will have to be removed from the position description (if described there), and from actual performance by the employee (if performed), to be sure to retain the grade of the position at the existing level. The Comptroller General has ruled on several occasions that “an employee of the Government is entitled only to the compensation of the position to which he is duly appointed, even though the employee may be officially or unofficially assigned to perform duties of a higher grade position”. In other words, the employee has the right to be paid only in relationship to the grade of the current officially documented position. However, it should be noted that once a personnel specialist actually certifies a position a higher grade by signing and dating the position record removing the higher grade duties could be considered adverse action for the employee, even though the Standard Form 50-B, “Notification of Personnel Action,” was not prepared for the promotion.

d. Further, Comptroller General and OPM decisions hold that once the job is certified upward by the personnel specialist, the Agency has up to four pay periods in which to promote the incumbent, change the job, or remove the incumbent from the job. If the Agency fails to take such action, retention in the higher graded position beyond the four pay periods represents a determination by the Agency that the incumbent is, in fact, qualified to perform the duties of the higher grade job. This becomes the basis for a legal claim for not only promotion to the higher grade, but, in addition, back pay for the entire period of time subsequent to the beginning of the fourth pay period after the classification decision, that is, the date the classifier upgraded the position.

e. Therefore, it is important that the supervisors carefully assess the grade level of the work assigned to each employee and to assign only work based on the duties and corresponding grade level of the employee’s current position. This is not meant to prevent occasional assignments of a higher grade level for developmental purposes. However, the developmental training aspect of the action should be clearly explained to the incumbent. The primary intent is to assure that full consideration is made in giving employees assignments which are commensurate with the grade level of the position. Thus, it is not appropriate to assign a task to the employee merely because the employee happens to be free to work on the next job that comes into the unit without considering the grade level of the tasks assigned.

f. These actions require that there be a clear understanding between the employee and the supervisor as to the nature, scope, and responsibilities of the employee’s position.

Discussions should be held with the employee from time to time to assure that there is a mutual understanding of the employee's duties. If the employee has assumed new duties which are acceptable to the supervisor, these should be documented as mentioned above. If they are not approved, the supervisor must tell the employee to cease performing the work.

10. EVALUATION OF EMPLOYEES--PERFORMANCE AND PROMOTION CONSIDERATIONS

a. The supervisor should evaluate objectively the quality of performance and potential of employees and communicate these evaluations to employees. They should use these evaluations in making personnel management decisions including:

- (1) Recognizing and rewarding employee performance and competence through incentive awards, quality pay increases, or other appropriate means of recognition.
- (2) Selecting employees for advancement in accordance with pertinent requirements of the Federal and Agency merit and career promotion policies, and sound promotion selection techniques.

b. This does not mean that higher level duties are to be fragmented among several positions for the sake of advancement of employees. As mentioned before, a primary responsibility of the supervisor is to assure that all employees are assigned tasks corresponding to the grade level of their positions. Recognizing that there is only a certain amount of higher level work in the organization, the supervisor's first obligation is to assign the work to existing higher grade level employees.

c. To accomplish these responsibilities effectively, the supervisor, in conjunction with management, should establish not only the total manpower needs but also a viable grade level structure for these positions. Once having done this, career lines of progression may be established. These lines of progression should provide guidance and opportunity for employees to develop and advance in accordance with their capabilities and interests, and would tend to ensure management of a continued supply of experienced and tested people for higher level positions. The supervisor then can inform employees of opportunities available within the career system, assist employees in determining whether they want to participate in the career system and to establish career goals, and determine training and development activities required to enable employees to attain these career goals.

d. It is especially important that the supervisor consider the employee's capabilities for career progression early in the employee's career. As the employee is considered for higher level positions, capabilities and interests are of more critical concern because of the requirements to perform more responsible work requiring considerable judgment and initiative.

e. The employee, to have a better awareness of career opportunities, must recognize that promotions are based on the nature and level of duties assigned, and a promotion is not automatic solely because the employee has served a certain period of time in grade. Likewise, the employee should realize that there will normally be constraints on an opportunity for advancement in the organization, for instance, limited amounts of higher level work.

11. KEEPING EMPLOYEES INFORMED

a. The supervisor should keep employees informed of their roles in accomplishing the Agency's mission; of public employment and mission accomplishment; and of their rights, privileges, and obligations as Government employees. This includes the employee's rights to discuss the problem with the Personnel Officer, the Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, their Personnel Management Specialist; counselors on ethics, conflicts of interest, and other matters of conduct; and a supervisor or management official of higher level than the employee's immediate supervisor.

b. Accomplishment of all of these responsibilities is not an easy task, but each is a necessary element for effective utilization of scarce workforce resources, and meeting governmental regulatory requirements and policies.